FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Buckaroo Pass Fence Extension and Water Developments

EA# OR-010-2004-07

The Bureau of Land Management, Lakeview District, Lakeview Resource Area, has analyzed a proposal and several alternatives to extend the Buckaroo Pass fence and complete the division of the Common pasture into North and South pastures. This fence construction and associated water developments would improve the implementation of the Beaty Butte Allotment Management Plan (AMP) by reducing cattle drift and allow one pasture each year to get complete rest. This project is in conformance with the Lakeview Resource Management Plan/Record of Decision (2003), the Beaty Butte Allotment Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (1998) and the Wilderness Interim Management Policy (1985). There are no wild and scenic rivers, fisheries, wetlands, floodplain resources, known hazardous waste areas, areas of religious concern, or prime or unique farmlands in the immediate project areas. No significant or disproportionate impacts would occur to low income or minority populations. The risk of noxious weed infestation would be low. Neither adverse nor beneficial impact is anticipated to air quality, lands, minerals and energy resources. Surveys found no threatened or endangered plants or animals and the small amount of ground disturbance will cause no impact to potential cultural or paleontological resources in the proposed project area.

The fence construction would disturb soils and vegetation in about a 10-15 foot wide swath along the fence route. Livestock trailing along the new fence lines and around the new traps would also result in some surface disturbance. The new pipelines would be on the surface and result in almost no disturbance, however there would be surface disturbance around the troughs caused by cattle congregating there. In one of the alternatives there would be minor surface disturbance within the Basque Hills Wilderness Study Area.

On the basis of the analysis contained in the attached EA and all other available information, my determination is that none of the alternatives analyzed would constitute a major federal action which would adversely impact the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is unnecessary and will not be prepared.

for Robert D. Hopper

Thomas E. Rasmussen, Manager
Lakeview Resource Area

13 May 04
Date

EA Number: OR-010-2004-07

PROJECT TITLE/TYPE: Buckaroo Pass Fence Extension and Pipeline

PROJECT LOCATION: South central Oregon (see Map 1).

BLM OFFICE: Lakeview Resource Area, Lakeview District, 1301 South G Street, Lakeview, OR 97630.

CONFORMANCE WITH APPLICABLE LAND USE PLAN: The proposed project is in conformance with the Beaty Butte Allotment Management Plan/Record of Decision (AMP/ROD; 1998), the Lakeview Resource Management Plan/Record of Decision (RMP/ROD; 2003), and the Wilderness Interim Management Policy (1995).

PURPOSE and NEED FOR ACTION: The purpose and need for the proposed action is to more clearly define two existing pastures within the Beaty Butte Allotment (0600). The two pastures are used to manage livestock in a rest rotation grazing system, as identified in the Appendix, on page 1-4 of the Beaty Butte AMP/ROD (1998). The current management includes the use of an existing pasture boundary fence, which extends across the middle of the allotment in an east-west direction from Shirk Ranch through Buckaroo Pass to a rim near Lake waterhole. A large gap exists in pasture boundary on the eastern side of the allotment (i.e. no fence occurs). Natural barriers and herding have been used in this area to try to keep cattle out of the rested pasture, but this has proven ineffective.

DESCRIPTION of PROPOSED ACTION: The proposed project would involve extending an existing pasture fence across the allotment to completely separate the north and south pastures (Map 1). Fence construction would require mowing sagebrush in 10-15 foot wide swath. Water development would also be needed for wild horse and livestock use following fence construction.

ALTERNATIVES: Several alternatives were considered. They are described below.

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE – This alternative would consist of making no modifications to the current fence, water sources, or grazing management. No fence extension or pipeline would be constructed. Herding would continue to be used to keep cattle in the proper pasture.

ALTERNATIVE 1 - PREFERRED PLAN – This alternative would consist of extending the existing fence about 9 miles to the southeast to Actney Camp. Four fence "traps" would be created around the existing Butch, Swede, Bald Mountain, and Shelby Waterholes to manage livestock and wild horse access to water (Map 2). In addition, two pipelines would be required (Map 5). About one-quarter mile of pipeline would be constructed on public land along with a new trough outside the trap fence around Bald Mountain Waterhole. Water would be piped in a second pipeline from Seep Spring to a trough approximately one-half mile north of the spring, located on the north side of the proposed fence. These would provide water for wild horses when livestock are in the South pasture. Water could also be used by both livestock and wild horses on years livestock are in the North pasture. Gates would be opened when livestock are not on the allotment to allow wild horses to move between pastures.

ALTERNATIVE 2 – This alternative would consist of extending the fence about 9 miles to the southeast to Actney Camp along a different alignment (Map 3). Three fence traps and one pipeline would be needed. Water would be piped from Seep Spring to a trough approximately one-half mile north of the spring, located on the north side of the proposed fence (Map 5). Gates would be opened when livestock are not on the allotment to allow wild horses to move between pastures.

ATERNATIVE 3 – This alternative would consist of extending the fence directly east about 10 miles to the eastern allotment boundary (Map 4). This would include about 6 miles of fence crossing the Basque Hills Wilderness Study Area

(WSA). Gates would be opened when livestock are not on the allotment to allow wild horses to move between pastures. No pipelines or other water developments would be constructed.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT: The affected environment within the Beaty Butte Allotment is described in more detail within Chapter 3 of the Beaty Butte Allotment Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (AMP/FEIS; 1998). The majority of this description is incorporated by reference and will not be repeated here. However, a summary of the resource values most likely to be affected by the proposed project is included below.

Soils: The soils in the project area include the Lonely-Robison Association which occupies about 50% of the impacted area, and is a mixture of loamy and clay soils. The other soil types present include the Raz-Brace Complex (22%), a shallow loam, the Robison-Fourwheel Association (11%), a cobbly loam, the Sagehen-Rock Outcrop (11%), a stoney claypan and Croseus-Rock Outcrop (6%), a very stoney clay.

Vegetation: The vegetation occupying the project area is primarily big sagebrush with a perennial grass understory that includes Thurber's needlegrass, bluebunch wheatgrass, Sandberg's bluegrass and bottlebrush squirreltail. About 12% of the acres to be impacted are occupied by low sagebrush with a Sandberg's bluegrass understory.

Wilderness Study Areas: The Basque Hills WSA is located east of the East Beaty Butte Loop Road. A more detailed description of existing conditions within the WSA can be found in the Oregon Wilderness Final Environmental Impact Statement (1989).

Wildlife: The Beaty Butte allotment supports a wide diversity of terrestrial wildlife. The allotment provides yearlong habitat for mule deer and yearlong and winter habitat for pronghorn antelope which serves as a migratory corridor between Hart Mountain and Sheldon Refuges. The project area lies within yearlong pronghorn range. The allotment also provides habitat for Greater sage-grouse a Bureau Sensitive species. There are 25 known sage grouse strutting grounds within the allotment, none of which lie within the project area. The larger allotment area provides habitat for pygmy rabbits, another Bureau Sensitive species, however no known pygmy rabbit habitat exists specifically within the project area. Peregrine falcons and bald eagles (Threatened and Endangered species) have been seen migrating through the allotment, however, no known nesting sites have been identified. The allotment provides habitat for numerous other wildlife species including waterfowl and waterbirds, raptors, carnivores, small mammals, California bighorn sheep, and non-game birds.

Wild Horses: The proposed project is located within the Beaty Butte Herd Management Area (HMA) which is managed for 100-250 horses under the direction provided in the Beaty Butte Wild Horse Management Plan (1977), as amended by the Lakeview RMP/ROD (2003).

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS: The general effects of fence construction, water development, and pasture management are described in Chapter 4 of the Beaty Butte AMP/FEIS (1998) and are incorporated here by reference. However, several of the alternative fence corridors considered in this EA are different from those envisioned at the time the AMP/FEIS was written. The actual ground disturbance would be about 10-15 feet wide along the entire length of the fence and pipelines (up to 10 miles) and includes the area around Butch, Swede, Bald Mountain, and Shelby Waterholes. The total area of direct impact would be about 17 acres. The potential environmental impacts resulting from all the alternatives relative to the following critical resource values were evaluated. The following is a summary of the results:

Critical Element/ Resource Value	Affected Yes	Affected No	Critical Element/ Resource Value	Affected Yes	Affected No
Air Quality		X	T & E Species		X
ACEC/RNAs		X	Wilderness	X (Alt. 3 only)	X
Cultural Resources		X	Wild & Scenic Rivers		X
Farmlands, Prime/Unique		X	Hazardous Wastes		X
Floodplains		X	Water Quality		X
Native American Cultural/ Religious Concerns		X	Wetlands/Riparian Zones		X
Low Income/ Minority Populations		X	Noxious Weeds		X

DESCRIPTION of OTHER IMPACTS:

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Soils: There would be continued impacts around several existing water sources since the lack of a fence would result in some cattle drift into the rest pasture every year. These cattle would congregate around water sources resulting in trampling impacts every year. However, the aerial extent of these effects would be small relative to the size of the rest pasture.

Vegetation: There would be continued impacts around several existing water sources since the lack of a fence would result in some cattle drift into the rest pasture every year. This continued grazing without a rest period would result in the loss of perennial vegetation around the waterholes and reduced ground cover.

Wilderness Study Areas: Not building a fence would allow cattle drift to continue. Portions of WSA's that are scheduled for rest in a given year could be grazed instead, especially around waterholes. This would negatively impact wilderness values.

Wildlife: There would be continued impacts to sage grouse, mule deer, pronghorn antelope, and other wildlife species around water sources since cattle congregate around water sources and compete for forage and water. Sage grouse and pronghorn antelope rely heavily on forbs in their diet which would be impacted by the continual use by livestock.

ALTERNATIVE 1 - PREFERRED PLAN

Soils: There would be some minor, site-specific impacts to soils in the project area. These were described in the Beaty Butte AMP/FEIS (1998), page 45, where it states that the construction of fences would result in some trampling impacts along new fence lines. The proposed fence would intersect 4 existing waterholes. The soils in a small area directly adjacent to these waterholes within the traps would be impacted because grazing use and associated trampling would occur every year. Because the proposed fence would allow for an effective rest rotation grazing system, as described in the Beaty

Butte AMP/FEIS, page 47, soils around many other dirt tanks and spring sites would benefit, by providing at least one year of rest from grazing. The increased ground cover would reduce soil erosion around these sites during both the rest and grazing periods. The construction of the two pipelines would have a small, but permanent impact on soils within the construction zone, as well as temporary trampling-related impacts in the area immediately surrounding the new water troughs.

Vegetation: The vegetation directly adjacent to the new fence would be impacted by fence construction and the subsequent cattle trailing that would occur along the new fence. The big sagebrush plants would be impacted since a 10-15 foot wide swath along a 9 mile long path would be mowed to allow for fence construction. This amounts to about 10 acres of sagebrush being mowed. Some of the sagebrush would return in 10-15 years, but with trailing along the fence there would be some permanent impact. The impact of trailing and increased utilization along the fence would also reduce the amount of perennial grass present along the proposed fence. The vegetation within a small area directly adjacent to the four dirt tanks would also be impacted since it would be grazed every year. The vegetation within a small area directly adjacent to the 2 new water troughs would also be impacted by heavy grazing use every other year.

The construction of the proposed fence and pipelines would implement a more effective rest rotation grazing system. This, in turn, would benefit the vegetation within most of the rested pasture, especially around the springs and dirt tanks. The number and acreage of the areas that would benefit from rest would far exceed the amount of area impacted from fence and pipeline construction or trailing.

Wilderness Study Areas: The proposed fence and pipelines would not enter the Basque Hills WSA and, therefore, would have no impact on wilderness values.

Wildlife: The construction of 9 miles of fence would minimally impact mule deer, pronghorn antelope, and California bighorn sheep movement within the allotment. Fencing could cause limited direct mortality to animals. However, the negative impacts of fencing would be minimized by adhering to standard BLM fencing specifications for wildlife and locating fences in areas visible to wildlife, including sage grouse. The fencing and pipelines would benefit wildlife by allowing the larger pasture areas periodic rest and reducing wildlife/livestock competition for forage and water.

Wild Horses: Wild horse movement patterns or use of a specific portion of the HMA would be temporarily disrupted until the horses adapt and alter their previous migration routes. Horses would be free to move between pastures when livestock are not on the allotment. The number of water sources available to wild horses would be reduced, because only horses in the same pasture as livestock would be able to access water at Butch, Swede, Bald Mountain, and Shelby Waterholes. The addition of pipelines from Seep Spring to south of Shelby Waterhole and from Actney Spring to troughs in and out of the trap at Bald Mountain Waterhole would provide more dependable water for wild horses at both sites.

ALTERNATIVE 2

The impacts of this alternative would generally be similar to Alternative 1 except there would be only three waterholes with traps around them instead of four with the Bald Mountain Waterhole being only in the South Pasture. There would be no need for a pipeline from Actney Spring to Bald Mountain Waterhole.

ALTERNATIVE 3

Soils: The impacts to soils would be similar to Alternatives 1 and 2 because

this route contains the same types of soils.

Vegetation: The vegetation directly adjacent to the fence would be impacted by fence construction and the subsequent cattle trailing that would occur along the new fence. The big sagebrush plants would be impacted since a 10-15 foot wide swath would be mowed to allow for fence construction. This amounts to about 12 acres of sagebrush being mowed, including about 5 acres in the Basque Hills WSA. Some of the sagebrush would return in 10-15 years, but with trailing there would be some permanent loss of sagebrush. The impact of trailing and increased utilization along the fence would also reduce the amount of perennial grass present along the proposed fence.

The construction of the proposed fence would implement a more effective rest rotation grazing system which would, in turn, benefit the vegetation in the rested pasture, especially around the springs and dirt tanks. The number and acreage of the areas that would benefit from the year of rest would far exceed the amount of area impacted from fence construction and trailing.

Wilderness Study Areas: The proposed fence would cross the Basque Hills WSA for about 6 miles. In order to justify the fence along this alignment, it would need to clearly enhance wilderness characteristics. There would be temporary surface disturbance along the fence about 10-15 feet wide as the existing vegetation would have to be mowed to build the fence. The fence would have a negative impact on the naturalness of the existing wilderness character due to placing a new man-made structure within the WSA. However, the fence would be a temporary structure that could be removed should the area be designated wilderness. Therefore, the proposed fence is not expected to impair the suitability of the area to be designated wilderness at some point in the future.

The proposed fence would allow for the rest rotation system to function as described in the Beaty Butte AMP/ROD (1998). It would provide a year of rest in approximately half of the WSA each year. The fence would eliminate drifting cattle which tend to congregate in the same areas within the WSA (particularly around water sources) every year. This year-round grazing does not allow the vegetation to recover. Therefore, the proposed fence and the associated effective rest rotation system, would improve grass vigor and production, resulting in an improved ecological condition within the WSA.

Wildlife: The impacts to wildlife would generally be similar to Alternatives 1 and 2. However, this alternative could have a greater impact on pronghorn antelope (north-south) migration between Hart Mountain and Sheldon Refuges by extending the fence along this alignment.

Wild Horses: Wild horse migration routes would be impacted to the same extent as Alternatives 1 and 2. Water sources for wild horses would be reduced throughout the HMA, because horses on either side of the fence would only be able to access half of the allotment during the livestock grazing season.

NOXIOUS WEED CONSIDERATIONS: No known populations of noxious weeds are present within the project area.

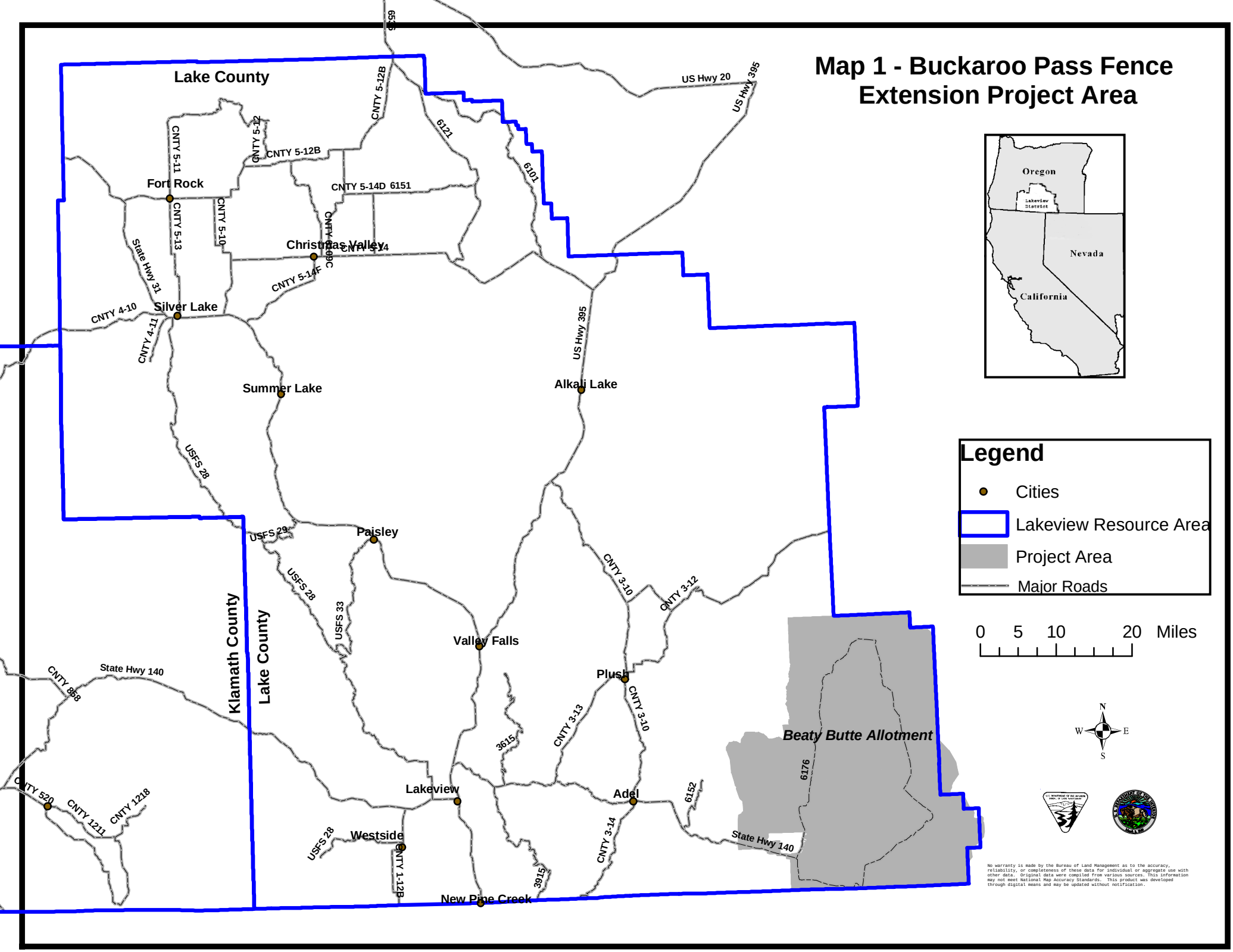
DESCRIPTION of MITIGATION MEASURES and RESIDUAL IMPACTS: Gates within the alternative fence alignments would be opened during the non-grazing season (November-March) to allow wildlife and wild horses to more easily move between pastures. In addition, fences under all 3 action alternatives would be built to standard wildlife specifications (3 wires with bottom wire smooth and 18" spacing and 12" spacing on top wires) to allow for antelope and deer passage.

Troughs associated with the new pipelines would be fitted with floats to prevent overflow.

PREPARER(S):

Les Boothe	Rangeland Management Specialist
Teresa Romasko	Wild Horse Specialist
Vern Stofleth	Wildlife Biologist

Map 1 - Buckaroo Pass Fence Extension Project Area



Legend

- Cities
- Lakeview Resource Area
- Project Area
- Major Roads

0 5 10 20 Miles

N
W E
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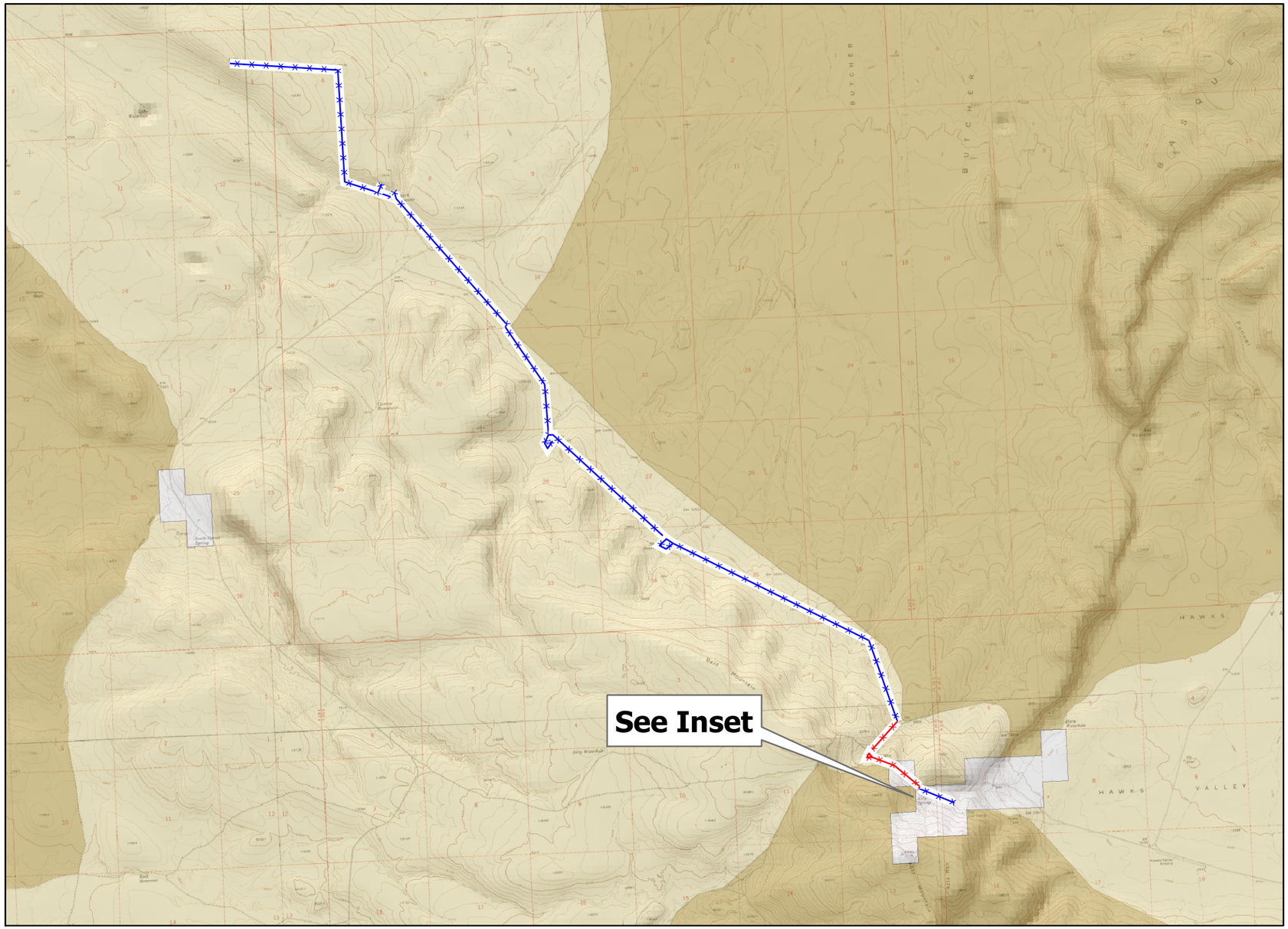
Buckaroo Pass Fence Extension -- Alternative 1



Legend

- Alternative 1 Fence
- Alternative 1&2 Fence
- Bureau of Land Management
- Private
- Wilderness Study Area

2.5 1.25 0 2.5 Miles

N

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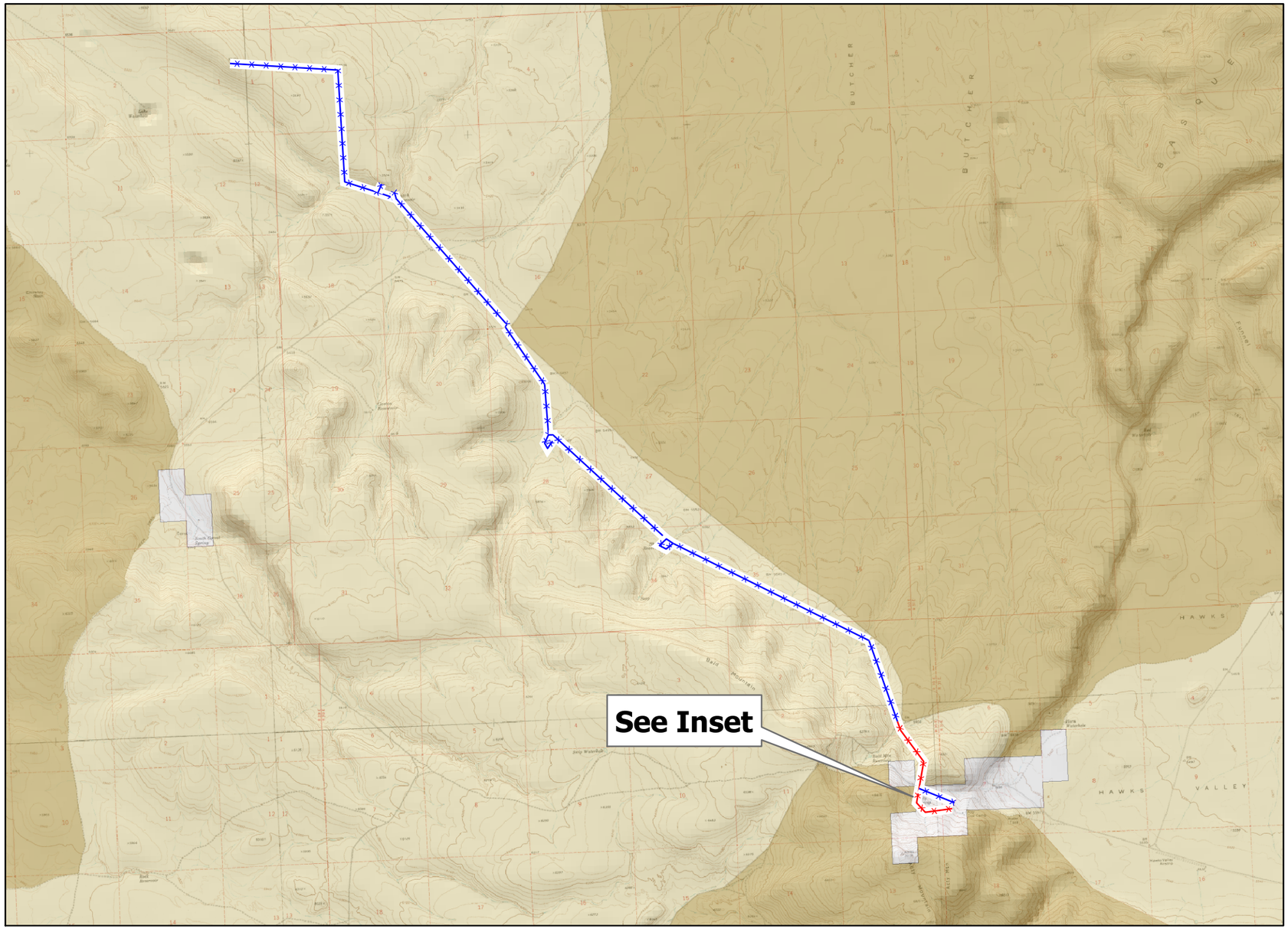
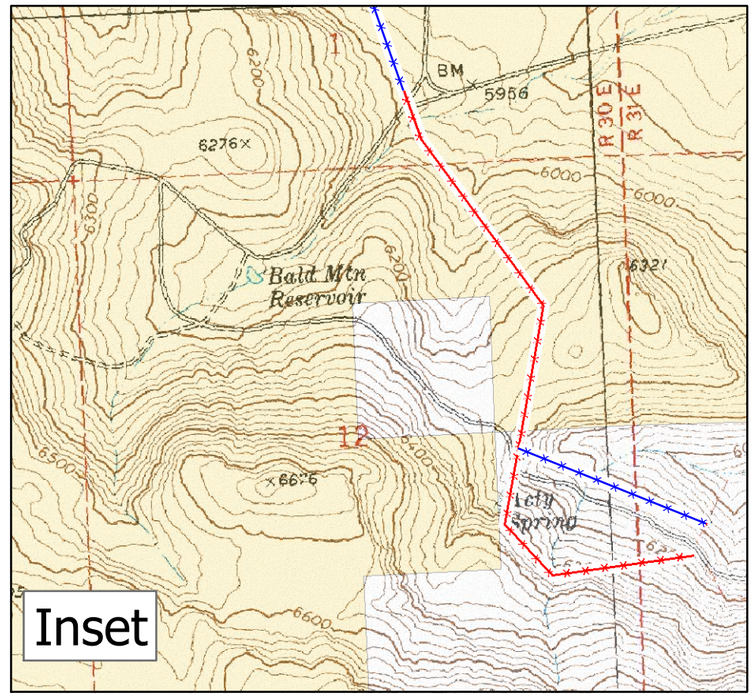
Buckaroo Pass Fence Extension -- Alternative 2





Legend

- Alternative 1 Fence
- Alternative 1&2 Fence
- Bureau of Land Management
- Private
- Wilderness Study Area

2.5 1.25 0 2.5 Miles

N

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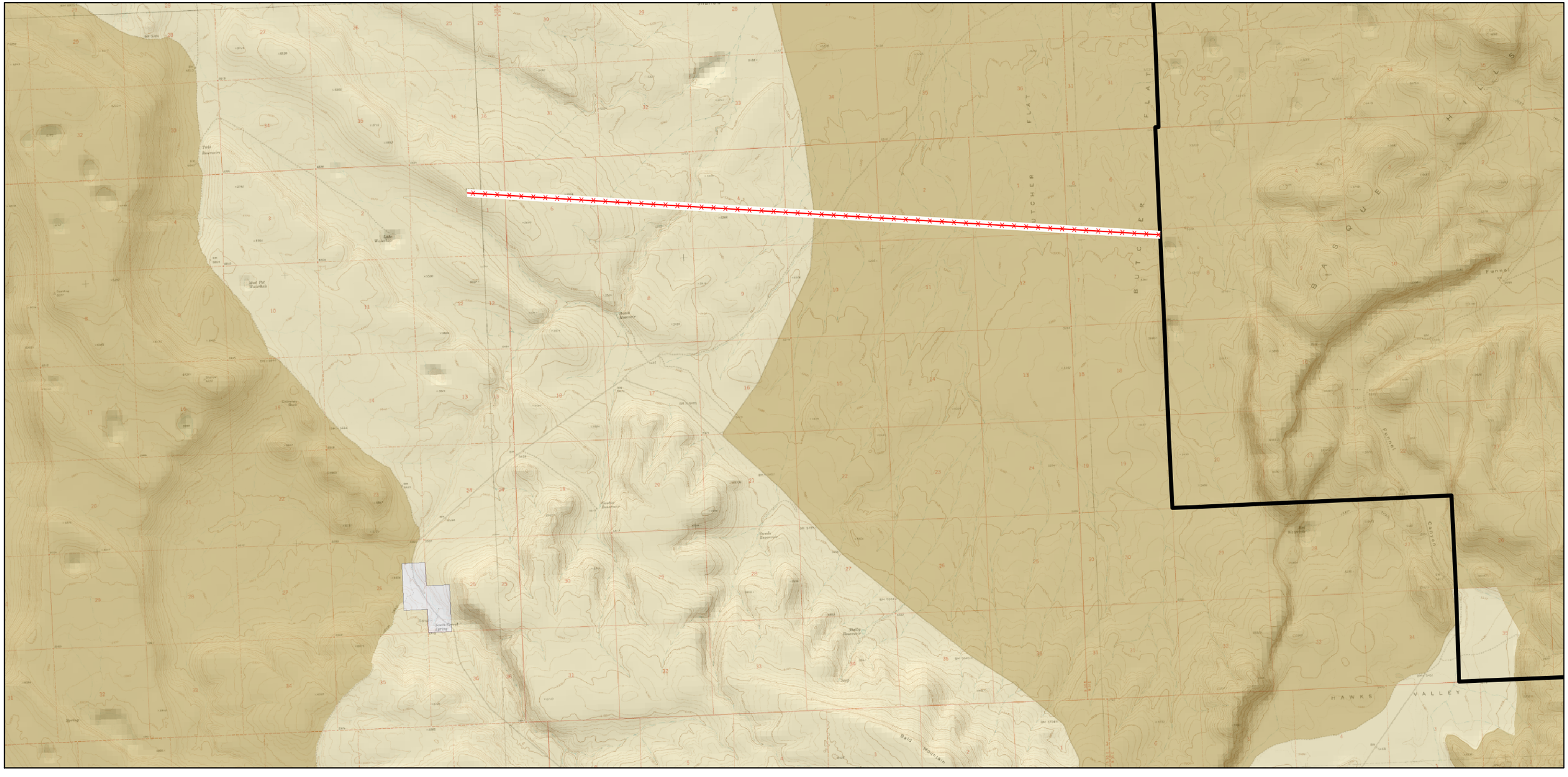
Buckaroo Pass Fence Extension -- Alternative 3



Legend

- Lakeview District BLM Boundary
- Wilderness Study Area
- Alternative 3 Fence

Ownership

- Bureau of Land Management
- Private

1 0.5 0 1 Miles

N

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BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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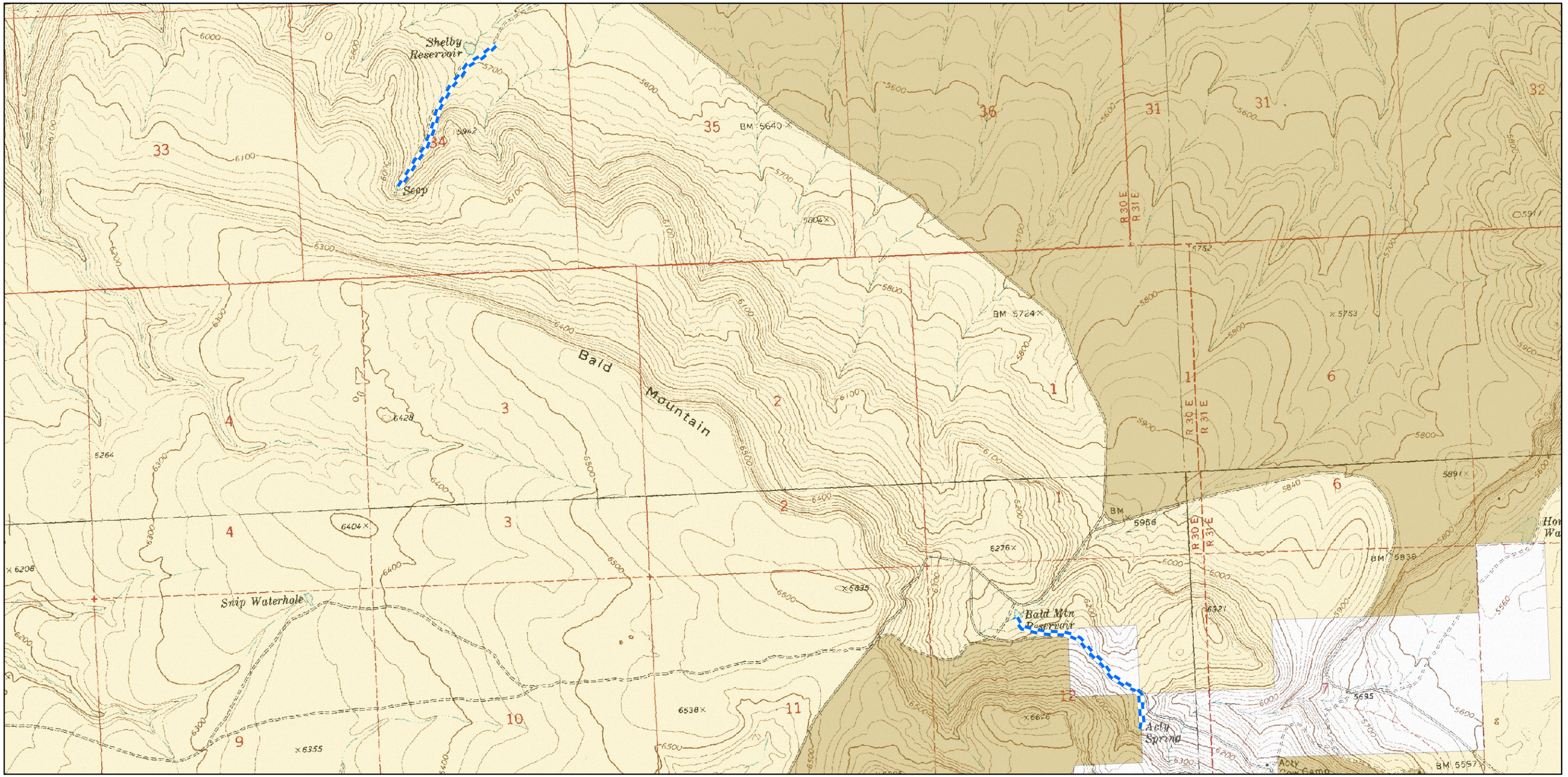
Buckaroo Pass Proposed Pipelines



Legend

- Proposed Pipelines
- Bureau of Land Management
- Private
- Wilderness Study Area

0.75 0.375 0 0.75 Miles

N

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